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UNCLAS PARIS 004881

SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: UK ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS PROGRAMS HELP
HALT LOSS OF PLANT DIVERSITY

1. Summary: At a July 11 UNESCO presentation, UK representatives of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew ("Kew Gardens") summarized the scientific and cultural significance of Kew Gardens and reviewed its current programs, especially those helping halt the loss of plant diversity. End summary.

2. This cable is distributed to all embassies in capitals of UNESCO Member States so as to help re-build USG institutional knowledge about UNESCO. The USG decided to resume full membership status in UNESCO in October 2003, following a nineteen-year absence. The USG decision was grounded in a desire to participate more fully in UNESCO's important programs, especially in education, and on the finding that significant reforms had taken place at UNESCO.

3. At a July 11 meeting at Paris UNESCO headquarters, Professor Sir Peter Crane, the Director of Kew Gardens, reviewed the history of Kew Gardens, which was created in 1759 and inscribed onto the World Heritage List in 2003 because of its significance in the fields of botany, ecology, landscape and architecture.

He focused on four aspects of the Kew Gardens program:

- The U.K. Overseas Territory Program, which provides scientific/horticultural training of local counterparts;
- Drylands work (especially in Africa) to combat desertification and exploitation of plant species;
- Wet tropics work (especially in Africa and Southeast Asia); and
- Strengthening capacity in developing countries through global partnerships

Crane emphasized that Kew Gardens intends to continue to connect its work with key development needs (water, energy, health, agriculture, etc.)

4. The Kew Gardens focus on education, training and capacity building includes: informal education (visitors), school education, adult education, formal and informal individualized training (volunteers, students, etc.) and formal courses (diplomas in plant conservation strategies, botanic garden management, etc.) Kew Gardens also makes a particular effort to educate children.

5. Professor Crane described the Millennium Seed Bank Project, a global conservation program that collects and conserves both seeds and living species in partnership with scientists and institutions throughout the world. Project partnerships in arid and semi-arid countries focus on collection and conservation of dryland plant species and strengthening in-country capacity for seed banking.

6. Crane said that all exchanges of plant genetic resources that take place between Kew Gardens and its partners are governed by legally binding formal access and benefit-sharing agreements in conformity with national legislation in each participating country.

7. During the discussion session, questions were posed concerning several different issues, including: the size of the organization (600 people with a budget of 19 million, primarily funded by the U.K. government); how Kew Gardens can directly aid countries that are interested in preserving plant life (Kew Gardens offers training and capacity building for emerging scientists on plant conservation techniques, sustainable use of plant resources, etc.); how Kew Gardens is involved in climate change issues (Kew Gardens is not focused or directly involved in climate change, although more can be done in this area - climate change is another rationale for seed banking); and what can be done about the problem of invasive species (an appropriate program of management is necessary to control invasive species).

8. Comment. This successful event shows that UNESCO works well when it serves as a forum for exchanges of scientific information. For example, the Afghan UNESCO Ambassador expressed his gratitude for the information he received during this event about technical and training assistance that could help revitalize plant life in his badly damaged

country. End comment.

Koss